

For almost as long as I can remember, the migraine headache has been, to me, an intruder with an unexpected outcome. The cause of countless missed ballet classes, shortened summer vacations, an almost insatiable chocolate craving, and much of my mother's sleep deprivation, it is both my greatest nuisance and my greatest fascination. I like to classify the migraine headache as an unsolved mystery, and while I would have no objections should the migraines stop, I will never let them disappear from my consciousness completely, at least not until the mystery is solved.

Observation, of course, is the first step toward a solution. My headaches start with a slow pulse, usually behind my left eye, which becomes increasingly intense over time. Bright light, noise, and sudden movements augment the pain, and I feel a constant urge to scream or grit my teeth, both of which would only serve to make the headache worse.

Those observations are more or less a version of the description I provided to my first neurologist, whom I saw when I was about ten years old. He presented his reaction in the form of a powerful prescription medication, and after my experience with the excruciating headache caused by that medication, my trust for pills was compromised, to say the least. In my opinion, western medicine is far too dependent on pills, and I know that I am not alone in that sentiment.

Since then, I have looked into other methods. My mother was especially intent on finding an alternative to medications, and as a result, I spent a year void of chocolate (hence the craving), peanut butter, packaged meat, fake cheese, and citrus fruit. In retrospect, the diet may have been a bit overdone, but specifically chocolate milk and fake cheese on pizza did turn out to be trigger foods for my headaches. Still, the search for a more effective treatment continued, until, in fact, I struck gold halfway around the world.

Chinese traditional medicine has many skeptics in the western medical establishment because of its seemingly non-technical methods. A traditional Chinese doctor diagnoses its patients with principles of energy and balance, and medications consist predominantly of herbs rather than chemicals; it can give the impression

of witchcraft rather than a medical system. Nonetheless, I have seen these methods work for people, myself included. For example, my mother showed me the connections between different parts of my body, that by pressing on a nerve in my right hand I could alleviate pain behind my left eye. My father also introduced me to meditation and the basic ideas of Qi Gong, and while sometimes I suspect that he obtained much of his information from "Kung Fu," the television series, I still meditate every time I get a headache, and it is extremely effective.

Optimists say that every cloud has a silver lining. In my case, that silver lining is a desire to pursue medical research, which would never have emerged without the impetus that my headaches provided. My exposure to Chinese traditional medicine has led to an interest in combining eastern and western methods, and I believe such a combination has a lot of potential within multiple branches of medicine. It opens a world of possibilities for combating the migraine, along with countless other unsolved medical mysteries, and I want to be part of the solution.

Thanks to my greatest nuisance, I am a detective at heart.